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Best North American ski resorts

Relatively few Britons venture over the pond to ski in North America. But nearly all those who do relish the experience and think it well worth the extra travelling time and expense. The attractions include more frequent snowfalls than in the Alps, tree lines that reach the top of the mountains (so visibility is good when it's snowing), relatively deserted pistes, immaculate piste grooming, efficient lifts and few queues, high-quality accommodation, and high standards of service and courtesy.

And for competent skiers who enjoy skiing powder, there's the knowledge that they can safely do so without paying for a guide or using avalanche safety equipment. This is because, unlike Europe, every resort has a ski area boundary marked by signs or a rope everywhere within this boundary, however steep and gnarly it is, is avalanche controlled and patrolled. But North America has resorts to suit everyone, not just good skiers and boarders. Here's our pick of where to go. These two linked resorts are the powder capitals of the world, and the snow here is as plentiful, frequent and light as it comes. On average, they receive more than 40 feet of snow a year, twice as much as most resorts in the Alps and some Colorado resorts (and around 50 per cent more than nearby Park City). Most of the slopes are left ungroomed so you can enjoy the fresh powder but there are some groomed runs for intermediates. Snowboarding is banned on Alta's slopes (but allowed in Snowbird). The resorts have few bars, restaurants or shops except those linked to hotels. Where to stay

The ski-in, ski-out Cliff Lodge is Snowbird's biggest and plushest hotel with a lovely rooftop spa. 1,459. Alpine Answers (020 7801 1080; www.alpineanswers.co.uk)

Alternatives

Whistler, Fernie

Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Jackson does a great job of projecting a macho image you must have seen heroic pictures of skiers jumping into narrow, steep Corbet's Couloir but there is plenty of substance behind the image. Jackson Hole has a huge amount of seriously steep terrain that gets a seriously large amount of snow. It's not high, and it gets plenty of sun, so snow deteriorates more quickly than you might wish. But few worry as there's usually another snowstorm brewing. The town of Jackson, a 15-minute drive from the slopes, promotes a Wild West image with its wooden sidewalks, cowboy saloons and pool halls; this is amusing at first, but soon palls. We prefer to stay at the base of the hill, have a few beers in the Mangy Moose at close of play and visit town occasionally.

Where to stay

The Four Seasons' blend of comfort, service and location on the slopes, just above the lift base is unrivalled. 1,799. Ski Dream (0845 277 3353; www.wandotravel.com)

Alternatives

Revelstoke, Kicking Horse

Park City, Utah



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Of course, most of the resorts listed here are fine for intermediates, but Park City is one of the best its mountain is laced with lovely blue runs, with plenty of easy blacks to try on good days, plus tempting ungroomed glades (lightly wooded slopes).

Equally importantly, for the seriously mileage-hungry there are two other resorts close by. The small but excellent Deer Valley (no snowboarding allowed) is separated by nothing more than a fence, while the extensive ski area of The Canyons is a short bus-ride away.

Park City is huge, but has some lodgings close to the lift base and a historic Main Street with lots of lively restaurants and shops.

Where to stay

In a resort with no really compelling places to stay, the Yarrow at least has good service in a reasonable position. 1,126. Crystal (0871 231 5655; www.crystalski.co.uk)

Alternatives

Heavenly, Vail There are few nursery slopes in the world to rival the long, wide, gentle run at the foot of Breckenridge's Peak 9 and a couple of those rivals are at the foot of next-door Peak 8. Couple this with a comfortable, fast six-seat chairlift, ample longer runs to progress to and reliably good snow, and you have the ideal launch pad.

Bear in mind that tuition is expensive in the US and that going directly to a resort this high (almost 3,000 metres) may induce altitude sickness if you are concerned about this, stay a night or two lower down (for example, in Denver). The Victorian-style town of Breckenridge is very jolly, with countless shops, bars and restaurants, and relatively good value.

Where to stay

The huge Beaver Run Resort has spacious rooms and apartments in a great slopeside position. 1,168. Inghams (020 8780 4433; www.inghams.co.uk)

Alternatives

Winter Park, Beaver Creek In the 1880s, Aspen was a booming Wild West silver-mining town with a population of 12,000, six newspapers and an opera house. The town's fortunes took a nosedive when the price of silver plummeted in 1893, and the handsome Victorian buildings fell into disrepair. But the wealth created by the growth of skiing here has resulted in the historic core being beautifully renovated to its former glory. This is a delightful place to stroll around in the evenings, window-shopping and enjoying its varied restaurants and bars. The four separate ski areas (one reached by gondola, three served by the free buses) have terrain to suit every ability.

Where to stay

The small, smart, central Lenado b & b, with open fire and individually designed rooms. 1,269. Ski Independence



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(0131 243 8097; www.ski-i.com)

Alternatives

Telluride, Crested Butte Big White, Canada Contrary to many people's expectations, most North American resorts have at least some ski-in, ski-out accommodation. But few can rival Big White for its ski convenience virtually all the hotels and apartments in this modern, purpose-built resort are ski-in, ski-out, with the main lifts starting below village level and even the Main Street being dubbed a ski run by the resort.

The terrain suits intermediates best, and the fact that it gets a lot of snow and has a lot of trees for shelter means that it is a good place to learn to ski powder. There's also a great area called Happy Valley with other activities such as ice skating, snowmobiling, tubing and snowshoeing, served by a gondola that works till late.

Where to stay

Chateau Big White is central, convenient and comfortable. 1,059. Frontier Ski (020 8776 8709; www.frontier-ski.co.uk)

Alternatives

Snowbird-Alta, Silver Star In general, North American resorts aren't big on partying apart from a few drinks at 4pm. But Whistler is a notable exception, with the bars and heated terraces at the foot of the slopes busy from mid-afternoon (often with live bands), restaurants that get booked up days or weeks in advance and clubs that rock until the early hours. There's a huge range of bars, from microbreweries and comfortable lounge bars to Irish pubs and sports bars. You need to be 19 to consume alcohol here and the law is strictly enforced, so carry your passport. The slopes form the biggest ski area in North America, with terrain to suit every standard.

Where to stay

Fairmont Chateau Whistler is very comfortable and right on the slopes. 1,519. Cold Comforts (includes a day's ski guiding; 0800 881 8429; www.cold-comforts.com)

Alternatives

Vail, Banff

Winter Park, Colorado

Winter Park may appear to be the poor relation of major Colorado resorts, suffering a bit of a hangover from being developed primarily for weekend skiers from nearby Denver. But the lack of glitz (and crowds on weekdays) suits families, as does the growing range of accommodation around the lift base.

There is excellent beginner terrain at the base, but the jewel is up the mountain the superb 25-acre Discovery Park, complete with an adventure trail through the woods. If you want to lose the children while you enjoy Winter Park's powder (it is the snowiest of all major Colorado resorts), the childcare facilities are among the best. The



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town of Winter Park is very limited, so you are not missing much by staying at the base.

Where to stay

Zephyr Mountain Lodge is a smart, modern apartment hotel right at the lift base. 986 for four sharing a two-bedroom suite. Skiworld (0844 493 0431; www.skiworld.ltd.uk)

Alternatives

Steamboat, Silver Star

Mammoth Mountain, California The surfing culture of California meant that snowboarding at Mammoth took off as soon as the sport was invented, and it remains a snowboarder hot spot. There are slopes for every ability level and the terrain parks are among the best in the world.

There are seven parks, with more than 50 jumps, 65 jibs and three half-pipes in 90 acres of freestyle terrain they range in difficulty from the beginner level Disco and Wonderland parks to Main Park, where all the features are up to pro-rider standard.

Where to stay

Mammoth Mountain Inn is good value and at the foot of the slopes at Main Lodge. 945. Ski Solutions (020 7471 7700; www.skisolutions.com)

Alternatives

Breckenridge, Park City Banff sits at one end of a fabulously scenic drive through various mountainous national parks. As a result, the town has a huge summer tourist trade and in winter lodgings are relatively cheap. For on-the-spot costs of eating and drinking, you won't find anywhere cheaper in Canada. They may be higher than in the cheapest resorts in the US but lift pass prices are appreciably lower.

Banff is a jolly little town with more than 100 bars and restaurants. It has three ski areas, each a bus ride from town (free with Tri-area pass). Norquay is the nearest and smallest, a few minutes away; Sunshine Village is 20 minutes away; Lake Louise is the biggest area and 45 minutes away.

Where to stay

Banff Caribou Lodge, a little way out of the centre, is a favourite. 679. Canadian Affair (020 7616 9184; www.canadianaffair.com)

Alternatives

Winter Park, Breckenridge

Example prices are per person for two sharing, room only, including flights and transfers, departing late January



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